



# September '20 Newsletter

Celebrating 63 Years of Birding  
1957-2020

## NEXT MEETING

**Due to Covid-19, we will not be meeting during April or May. We'll resume meeting in September via Zoom. (You'll receive instructions via email.) Stay well and happy birding.**

## Birding the Cloud Forests of Guatemala: Neo-Tropical Migrants that are Summertime Residents in Virginia

(As you may already know, our meetings will be held virtually using Zoom until it is safe to meet in person. Zoom is a popular way to broadcast each meeting to you via your computer, tablet or smart phone. Instructions will be available to you prior to the meeting.)

For our September 14th meeting we have a treat. Our program will be presented by two speakers: John Cahill who will be Zooming in from Chicago and his brother Peter who will be Zooming to us from Guatemala. This will be our first international presentation, so social distancing does have at least one benefit!

John and Peter (AKA Sunshine) will connect us to the Cloud Forest of the Verapaz region of Guatemala, leading us on an adventure to witness up-close and personal encounters with near mythic birds and stunning landscapes. They will speak about neo-tropical migrants that summer here and winter in Guatemala. This includes most of our wood-warblers and Thrushes, as well as Tanagers and Flycatchers. A few special concern species include the Golden-winged Warbler, Wood Thrush and the Canada Warbler.

Peter Sunshine Cahill is a cartographer, artist and gardener from Cobán, Alta Verapaz, currently living in Chicago, Illinois. Sunshine has birded extensively across Guatemala for over 18 years. Sunshine also works as a bird guide with Xikanel and as a freelance graphic artist. John is an expert birder and an exceptional tour guide. John is currently studying environmental engineering with an emphasis in forestry in Guatemala. For nearly ten years John has lead birding tours across Guatemala and Colombia. In Guatemala, John teaches professional bird guiding to local groups and has supported many regional bird research and conservation initiatives.

## Bald Cardinals

In mid-July George and I were observing a very sweet event at our bird feeder: a male cardinal feeding seeds to a female nearby. We got out our binoculars to observe more closely – but wait – wasn't there something odd about that male? In fact, distinctly weird? He appeared to have a skinny naked black head like a turkey vulture but was clearly a cardinal in all other respects. Research was indicated.

We quickly found out that this is not at all unknown and there was plenty of information about it online. Most authorities agree it is the result of some kind of feather mite that burrows into the birds skin and either causes the cardinal to lose their feathers or such intense itching that the bird scratches them out exposing the skin underneath. Was the bird going to die? According to a bird banding station at Hilton Pond, South Carolina who has captured several what they call "lizard-head" cardinals, recorded the birds' conditions, released them, and then recaptured them at later dates, the feathers grow back in short order and they are later found to have lovely full plumage. So it seems not.



However, since birds choose their mates based on looks, a bald-headed bird could be at a real disadvantage in the dating game until his feathers grow in. Maybe our male baldy was trying another tactic. Since he clearly lost out on appearance, was he trying to woo his mate with gifts of food? Alas, it wasn't working. After accepting several seeds, she flew off leaving him a lonely bird.

Submitted by Maxine Fraade and George Blonar

## Annual Dues

Annual club dues of \$12 for a single membership and \$20 for a family membership are due in September. Due to the unusual circumstances of COVID-19 the board has voted to make these optional for the 2020-2021 club year. If you wish to contribute annual dues please send your check to the address on the back of the newsletter. Also remember you can pay your dues conveniently and safely online at our website, [www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com](http://www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com).

## Field Trips

Yes, we are re-starting our field trips! They will look different this year because of Covid-19. We want to make sure that our leaders and participants are safe. Our plan is to limit group sizes to five per leader and to have two or more leaders for each outing with staggered departure times. Participants will have to keep a respectful 6 feet distance from each other. In addition, you will need to RSVP by e-mail ([rvbc2015@outlook.com](mailto:rvbc2015@outlook.com)) or phone field trip coordinator Mary Harshfield (540-309-8277) to reserve your spot. It will be up to the leader as to whether masks are required.

**SEPTEMBER 9th, WED., 8 AM —SECOND WEDNESDAY BIRD WALK AT GREENFIELD:** Barry Whitt and Annie Downing will each lead a group of five birders for a bird walk on the Cherry Blossom Trail at Greenfield. We will walk around Greenfield Lake in search for migrants and incoming waterfowl. The walk will be mostly flat walking for about 2 miles. We will also cover the grassy area overlooking the lake or the trail down to the lower pond. Bring your spotting scopes; note that scope owners will not be expected to share. You need to RSVP to reserve your spot (see above for details).

**Directions:** Take Exit 150B on I-81 and follow signs to Route 220N. Go about 4 miles and take a left at the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on the right.

**SEPTEMBER 20<sup>th</sup>, SUN., 8 AM---SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT** Kent Davis and Linda Cory will lead groups of five for a walk around the Sewage Treatment Plant. Entrance to the STP is by special permit and trip participants must all enter at the same time and stay together with their leader. This site is one of the best spots for viewing shorebirds in the Roanoke Valley. The property includes impoundments, sludge ponds, mudflats, riparian habitat and woodlands. Besides shorebirds, we can expect to see resident hawks and possibly ravens and fish crows. The walking is mostly flat with a short steep trail. Sturdy waterproof boots are recommended as it often muddy. RSVP to reserve your spot and find out exactly where you will be meeting. E-mail: [rvbc2015@outlook.com](mailto:rvbc2015@outlook.com) or call Mary Harshfield at 540-309-8277



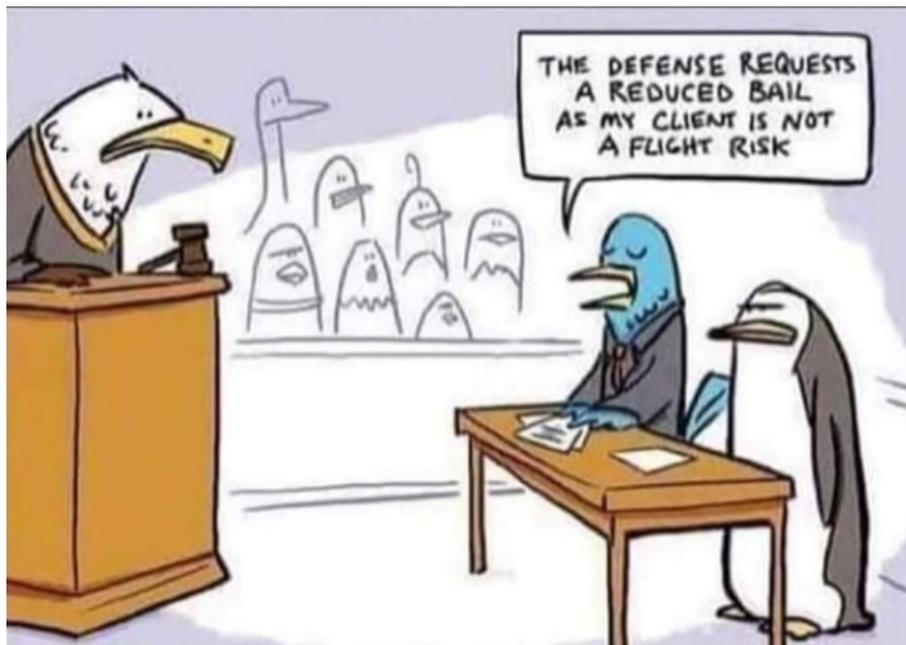
**HARVEY's KNOB Hawk watch:** From September 1<sup>st</sup> through November 30<sup>th</sup>, our club and the Lynchburg club report data on hawk migration at Harvey's Knob on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Located at milepost 95.6 near the Peaks of Otter, all are welcome to join our resident hawk watchers (they are there daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) to see how it is done. Bring a lawn chair, binoculars, and a spirit of adventure for learning about the annual hawk (and other raptors) migration. You can arrive and leave when you like and even though you may not be ready to ID each bird as it passes, extra eyes are welcome. The best time to observe broad-winged hawk migration from that overlook is from around Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>-Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>. In past years, thousands of broad-winged hawks have been spotted in a single day. Traditionally our club has joined the Lynchburg bird club on a specific day to celebrate the hawk watch season but at this time, no event has been planned. We don't want to have too many people congregating on the same day, so you are encouraged to go on your own; weekdays are probably best for avoiding crowds.

Upcoming:

**OCTOBER 3<sup>rd</sup>, SAT., 8 AM—GREEN HILL PARK**

Linda Cory and a leader to be determined will lead a walk at Green Hill Park in Salem. RSVP to reserve your spot and find out the meeting place. E-mail:

[rvbc2015@outlook.com](mailto:rvbc2015@outlook.com) or call Mary Harshfield at 540-309-8277



## Seeking Submissions for the 2021 Calendar

Once again, our club is preparing a club calendar, and this is your opportunity to submit your photos! Photos will be chosen on clarity, artistic quality, and seasonality. Up to four photos per current club member can be accepted in an electronic format. The deadline for your photo submission is September 11th and can be emailed to [dpmusyt@gmail.com](mailto:dpmusyt@gmail.com). Due to COVID-19 we cannot accept your photos in any other format, I hope you understand. When you do submit your photos, please supply your name, phone number, species of the bird, and location where the photo was taken

The selection process is unbiased – CLUB MEMBERS GET TO VOTE. The photos will be posted on our website [www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com](http://www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com) from September 25th to October 9th and voting is done via email [RVBC2015@outlook.com](mailto:RVBC2015@outlook.com). Votes are limited to one per single and student memberships and two for family memberships and will be verified by matching email addresses. The price of this year's calendar will be \$13.50 each, to cover rising costs, and will be ready for sale on October 30th. A sample calendar will be at on our website [www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com](http://www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com) through the end of November for preorders.

In lieu of not having the Bird Seed Sale this year, we have two options for distribution, 1) to hand out the calendars, and 2) to mail calendars to those who buy them off the website, but do not want to personally pick them up. The cost for mailing would be the \$13.50 for the calendar and \$2.50 for postage. For those who would like to pick them up, Betty Burke and Robin Austin have volunteered to hand out the calendars to those who preordered and for people who want to drop by. The pickup for preorders, and additional on-site sales, will be at the Roanoke Garden Club on Saturday November 21st and 28th between 10am - 2pm to hand out the orders. Anyone else who would like to volunteer, you are welcome to come. As always, calendar sales can continue thru the Christmas season and we can look at pick up dates for both November and December. Please contact David Musyt to sign up for a shift at [dpmusyt@gmail.com](mailto:dpmusyt@gmail.com).

## The Technology of Zoom

Zoom is a safe and easy way for the Bird Club to continue to meet during these uncertain times. For those of you who are familiar with the technology feel free to share your knowledge with others in the club. If you are unfamiliar with Zoom, we've prepared a step-by-step instructions for joining. These instructions should have been sent out via the club email. If you didn't receive them or need another copy please feel free to email, text, or call me.

A day or two before our club meeting you'll receive an email with log-in IDs and passwords. If you have any questions regarding how Zoom works or need technical assistance before the meeting, please let me know. Additionally if anyone would like to have a practice run on Zoom before the club meeting, I'd be happy to set that up as well. We don't want anyone to miss out on these meetings!!

Nathan Anderson / [nathan.anderson77@live.com](mailto:nathan.anderson77@live.com) / 540-728-1645

# 2020 Bluebird Trails Summary

Submitted by Carol Whiteside



Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) are well known in the United States for their brilliant plumage, sweet song, and use of nestboxes. It is hard to imagine that this species nearly went extinct in the early 1900s because of a deadly combination of management practices that removed the dead tree snags that bluebirds depend upon for nesting, the introduction of exotic species that competed for nesting cavities, and the detrimental effects of pesticides. The recovery of populations across the eastern United States is an example of how everyday citizens can play a role in conservation. The major factor in the bluebird's recovery was the establishment of nestboxes by private landowners across their range.

- National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Everglades, Florida

We offer sincere appreciation to the dedicated volunteers who monitor these three bluebird trails weekly all season to insure the success of our area Eastern Bluebirds. This year, we monitored despite the Coronavirus pandemic, record breaking July heat wave, extreme rainy and dry seasons; our bluebirds produced **501 eggs and fledged 441 (138 more than 2019!)**. These annual statistics are reported to the Virginia Bluebird Society at the end of the season. Most assuredly, the RVBC (and the birds!) gratefully thank the bluebird trail volunteer monitors for participating in this vital conservation endeavor. We gladly accept and train new monitors; please volunteer, it is very rewarding!

**Blue Ridge Parkway Trail:** the National Park Service suspended all volunteer work due to COVID-19. With the park remaining open to visitors, Carol Whiteside took on the sole responsibility of monitoring weekly. Then on May 26, 24 miles of the park was closed (and could possibly remain closed for another 18 months or more) due to two tremendous landslides, which made 15 of the 33 boxes inaccessible. Our accomplished birding friend/volunteer monitor, Ranger Dan Whitcomb and his family (wife Jen, twins Emma and Levi) continually monitored the closed section weekly on his days off from work. How fortunate are we to have an NPS law enforcement officer as a monitoring volunteer! Through the last 21 years, records were set (as indicated with \*) including all boxes were occupied producing eggs. There were two boxes with three separate fledglings each. This BRP trail 21 year recorded total has produced 5,112 eggs and 3,838 fledglings, a 75% success rate. Many thanks to the volunteers who signed up, but could not participate due to pandemic restrictions.

**Hanging Rock Golf Course Trail:** For the first time since we've been in charge of the trail all of our boxes produced at least 1 nest! We had no predators that we can identify, 7 missing eggs, 2 missing young, 5 infertile eggs and 1 dead baby. Our new monitor, John Foulkes, moved several of our boxes that have had problems in the past so we believe this has given us a better outcome. As for pandemic issues, we really have not had any! All our monitors were comfortable continuing to monitor this season and the only restriction was that Hanging Rock required us to use separate golf carts except for husband/wife teams.

A heart-felt **THANK YOU** to:

Allen and Robin Austin, Eunice Hudgins, Carol Whiteside, Dan and Jen Whitcomb, Emma and Levi Whitcomb, Sissy Logan, Judy Repass, Kathy Arrington, Mary Lou and Sid Barrett, Alan and Beth Boyce, Caryl Connolly, Lindsay Eades, John Foulkes, Diane and Michael Malpass, Nancy Reid, Karen Shelton, Dick and Donna Grubb, Donna Haley, Deborah Ingram, Bob Miller, Toni Pepin, Laurie and Scott Spangler.

Blue Ridge Parkway Carol Whiteside, chairman 33 boxes			
Species	Eggs	Fledged	Success
E. Bluebird	203	171	84%
C. Chickadee	19	*19	*100%
Tree Swallow	44	24	55%
House Wren	12	*12	*100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>80%</b>
First egg: * March 21, 2020			
Last fledging: August 16, 2020			

Hanging Rock Golf Course Sissy Logan and Judy Repass, chairmen 21 boxes			
Species	Eggs	Fledged	Success
E. Bluebird	170	156	92%
C. Chickadee	6	5	83%
Tree Swallow	0	0	
House Wren	0		
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>91%</b>
First egg: March 30, 2020			
Last fledging: August 7, 2020			

Botetourt Golf and Swim Club Dick Grubb, chairman 20 boxes			
Species	Eggs	Fledged	Success
E. Bluebird	128	114	89%
C. Chickadee	0	0	
Tree Swallow	51	36	70%
House Wren	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>84%</b>
First egg: April 2, 2020			
Last fledging:			



Roanoke Valley Bird Club  
c/o Diane Malpass  
3703 Forest Rd. SW  
Roanoke, VA 24015



**2020—2021 Roanoke Valley Bird Club Membership Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Memberships expire August 31st.

Annual Dues	
Individual \$12	_____
Family \$20	_____
Student \$7	_____
Sustaining \$30	_____
Adopt a Bluebird \$15	_____
Additional Contribution	_____
Total Payment	_____
Make check payable to the Roanoke Valley Bird Club c/o Diane Malpass 3703 Forest Rd. SW Roanoke, VA 24015	